

Bread Baking Now and Then

By ReadWorks



Did you know that bread is one of the earliest human inventions? Bread is a food made of flour and water. Other ingredients and shape can vary. Scientists have learned that humans have been eating bread in some form or another for 30,000 years.

Ancient Egyptians ate a lot of bread. In fact, because they had no potatoes or rice, bread was the most important carbohydrate source in the ancient Egyptian's diet.

Egypt gets little rain. Ancient Egyptian farmers relied on the annual flooding of the Nile River to irrigate their fields. Egyptian farmers paid a portion of their grain harvest to the Egyptian treasury.

Archaeologists have discovered illustrations of bakeries and loaves of bread in ancient Egyptian burial sites. Professional bakers and home-bakers used the same production techniques. Home-bakers, usually women, baked only the bread they would need for that day.

Egyptians used a grain from emmer wheat for their bread. The grain was ground by hand on a millstone. This process cracked and crushed the grain into coarse flour. The flour was mixed with water and sometimes a little old dough. It was placed in a pot and baked in a clay oven.

This Egyptian bread was a flatbread. Indian naan and Middle Eastern pita are two examples of flatbreads eaten today. At the end of the ancient Egyptian period, however, around 300 B.C., Egyptian bakers added to their bread an important ingredient: yeast. Yeast is a microscopic fungus. It makes bread rise.

Today bread production is more complicated. Yes, you can still bake your own bread at home with store-bought flour and yeast. You can also buy bread made at small bakeries. But the fluffy bread you see in grocery stores in the United States today is made in large commercial facilities. These commercial facilities, or plants, have business contracts to bake many different bread brands.

Most breads today are made using four basic ingredients: flour, yeast, salt, and water. Farmers across the United States grow wheat in large quantities. Half of the wheat produced is used in the United States. The other half is exported to other countries.

Grain is processed into flour by companies which then sell the flour to commercial bakeries. These bakeries produce the dough and bake the bread, then package it and arrange for its distribution to stores.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What have people been doing for 30,000 years?

- A growing wheat
- B planting crops
- C eating bread
- D using yeast

2. The sequence of bread-baking by the ancient Egyptians is described in the passage. When ancient Egyptians first baked bread, what happened before the flour was mixed with water?

- A A little bit of old dough was mixed in with the new dough.
- B The grain was ground by hand on a millstone.
- C The dough was placed in a pot and baked in a clay oven.
- D Home bakers baked the bread they would need for the day.

3. Bread was the most important source of carbohydrates for ancient Egyptians because they did not have rice or potatoes. What conclusion does this evidence support?

- A Ancient Egyptians did not borrow foods from other cultures.
- B Ancient Egyptians had access to an endless variety of foods.
- C Ancient Egyptians did not know how to grow rice and potatoes.
- D Ancient Egyptians had limited dietary resources.

4. What kind of climate did ancient Egypt have?

- A dry
- B tropical
- C wet
- D cold

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A why ancient Egyptians used emmer wheat
- B different types of flatbreads
- C the development of bread baking
- D wheat production in the United States

6. Read the following sentences: "Egypt gets little rain. Ancient Egyptian farmers relied on the annual flooding of the Nile River to **irrigate** their fields."

What does the word "**irrigate**" mean?

- A dry something out
- B supply with water
- C plant seeds in earth
- D make rows in the ground

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Most breads today are made from four main ingredients, _____, flour, water, salt, and yeast.

- A thus
- B also
- C ultimately
- D namely

8. What is yeast, and what does it do?

9. Describe the sequence by which grain ends up as bread in a store.

10. How has bread baking changed over time? Support your answer using information from the passage.
